A Toronto novel full of memories

Parade on an Empty Street
By Margaret Drury Gane
(Clarke, Irwin — $10.95)

In his research, Canadian neurologist Dr. Wilder Penfield, discovered that when a certain part of the brain is touched memories of a particular time in one's life are vividly recalled.

Well, that is what happened to me when I recently read Parade on an Empty Street. Perhaps, in part, it was because Margaret Drury Gane's book is a reminiscence of a childhood in Toronto, in the very era and area in which I grew up.

Through her young hero, Keith . . . 11 years going on 12, I was reminded of the romantic excitement that the news of the Second World War being declared brought on that Labor Day holiday weekend in 1939. Then I was reminded of the summer when the polio epidemic kept most children away from swimming pools and local theatres, and the feeling of great adventure brought by a trip to Centre Island, or Hanlan's Point, for a family picnic.

Although the city is Toronto, the neighborhood is similar to so many others. There is the retarded boy, who is different, and wanders happily down the middle of the street with his dog behind him, happy in his innocence.

If you have painful memories of being taught in a classroom to sing There'll Always be an England, bar by bar, phrase by phrase, or if you remember bringing home a singing canary on a cane from the local fair, (or in Keith's case the CNE), you will certainly relish this book.

Keith's parents still smart from the experience of the Depression, when for a short period they were on welfare. Now his father works in the silverware department at Eaton's. His mother is preoccupied with their visitor, Durham, who she has known all her life. He is an artist . . . philosophical and footloose, and because of him she feels the conflict between his free artistic approach to life and the dull responsible life she lives, caring for her husband and three sons.

There is the usual number of stereotype teachers in the neighborhood school. But there is also the good character definition of the young teacher, Chritchley-Williams, who brings humanity and understanding to his classroom.

But utmost in young Keith's mind is the girl Shirley, of his own age, who has moved into the house across from him to live with her deluded and embittered grandmother. She is so different from the others and mystery surrounds her. As he tries to befriend her a whole new part of life is opened up to him.

Even the quotes Ms. Gane uses to introduce the two parts of book are thought-provoking. From Dylan Thomas' Should Lanterns Shine, she quotes: *The ball I threw while playing in the park*
Has not yet reached the ground.

And then from Canadian poet Alden Nowlan's I, Icarus: *There was a time when I could fly, I swear it..*
Perhaps, if I think hard for a moment,
I can even tell you the year.

Margaret Drury Gane is a Toronto writer who has written short stories, and has been published in Chatelaine, Saturday Night, and Weekend. This, her first novel, is in much the same genre as Who has seen the Wind? and Streets of Riches, in that it gives some insight into that wonderful but difficult period of the pre-teen-ager.

Her style is easy, and the book very readable, with a well structured plot. It is one of the freshest novels I have read in a long time.

(Reviewed by Bettina Main, a St. Thomas librarian.)